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AIR POWER FOR PATTON'S ARMY

The XIX Tactical Air Command in the Second World War

David N. Spires

**Air Force History and
Museums Program
Washington, D. C.
2002**

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Spires, David N.

Air Power for Patton's Army : the XIX Tactical Air
Command in the Second World War / David N. Spires.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. World War, 1939-1945—Aerial operations,
American. 2. United States. Army Air Forces. Tactical
Air Command, 19th—History. 3. World War, 1939-
1945—Campaigns—Western Front. 4. Close air sup-
port—History—20th century. 5. United States. Army.
Army, 3rd—History. I. Title.

D790 .S65 2002

940.54'4973—dc21

2002000903

**In Memory of
Colonel John F. “Fred” Shiner, USAF
(1942–1995)**

Foreword

This insightful work by David N. Spires holds many lessons in tactical air-ground operations. Despite peacetime rivalries in the drafting of service doctrine, in World War II the immense pressures of wartime drove army and air commanders to cooperate in the effective prosecution of battlefield operations. In northwest Europe during the war, the combination of the U.S. Third Army commanded by Lt. Gen. George S. Patton and the XIX Tactical Air Command led by Brig. Gen. Otto P. Weyland proved to be the most effective allied air-ground team of World War II.

The great success of Patton's drive across France, ultimately crossing the Rhine, and then racing across southern Germany, owed a great deal to Weyland's airmen of the XIX Tactical Air Command. This deft cooperation paved the way for allied victory in Western Europe and today remains a classic example of air-ground effectiveness. It forever highlighted the importance of air-ground commanders working closely together on the battlefield.

The Air Force is indebted to David N. Spires for chronicling this landmark story of air-ground cooperation.

RICHARD P. HALLION
Air Force Historian

Editor's Note

One of the striking features of this story is the broad sweep taken by Third Army and XIX Tactical Air Command across France. It demanded a large number of maps be used to show places and activities in ways that words could not. However, to the greatest extent possible this work relies on maps prepared by contemporaneous creators, and thus has a number of maps reproduced from original histories of the period. Moreover, those which came from other sources largely were taken from the *West Point Atlas of American Wars*, a pair of volumes produced for the use of classes at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, New York. That volume has maps in larger format and with more explanation, so readers who wish to study the maps in greater detail are referred to that source, listed with each map.

Preface

Air Power for Patton's Army is a case study of one air-ground team's experience with the theory and practice of tactical air power employed during the climactic World War II campaigns against the forces of Nazi Germany. By the summer of 1944, the Allies had four fighter-bomber tactical air commands supporting designated field armies in northwest Europe, and in the fall they added a fifth (making four American and one British). Of these, the U.S. Third Army commanded by Lt. Gen. George S. Patton and the XIX Tactical Air Command (TAC) led by Brig. Gen. Otto P. Weyland deserve special attention as perhaps the most spectacular air-ground team of the Second World War on the Allied side.

From the time Third Army became operational on August 1, 1944, until the guns fell silent on May 8, 1945, Patton's troops covered more ground, took more enemy prisoners, and suffered more casualties than any other Allied army in northwest Europe. General Weyland's XIX TAC was there every step of the way: in the high summer *blitzkrieg* across France to the Siegfried Line, in the battle of attrition and positional warfare in Lorraine reminiscent of World War One's western front, in the emergency drive to rescue American troops trapped at Bastogne and help clear the Ardennes of Germans in the Battle of the Bulge, and finally, in crossing the Rhine and charging across southern Germany to the Czech and Austrian borders. There, Third Army forces linked up with Soviet military units converging on the fabled German Redoubt area from the east.

This study does not suggest that Weyland's XIX TAC proved superior to other tactical air commands in the European theater or that Weyland emerged as the only effective air leader. Indeed, numerous laurels were garnered by Weyland's colleagues and their respective TACs: Maj. Gen. Elwood R. Quesada's IX TAC that supported the First Army, Brig. Gen. Richard Nugent's XXIX TAC that supported the Ninth Army, and Brig. Gen. Gordon P. Saville's XII TAC that supported the Seventh Army and the French First Army. Moreover, during Ninth Air Force's eight-month buildup prior to Overlord (the invasion of France in June 1944), IX TAC, under an innovative General Quesada, played the central role in preparing for air operations at Normandy and on the continent. General Weyland remained in the background until Patton's forces entered combat on August 1, 1944. Because the XIX TAC entered combat later, it could and did use to good advantage the valuable experience of the IX TAC.

Traditional army and air force antagonisms and unsound tactical air doctrine are frequently cited as the major impediments to smooth air-ground relations and effective combat operations. Much of that contention was apparent

Air Power for Patton's Army

in Washington, D.C., even during World War II, where, facing the demands of a worldwide conflict, headquarters' staffs all too frequently focused on problems of intraservice and interservice competition at all levels. For military leaders and staffs in Washington, service politics often took precedence and preferred doctrine often served to buttress disagreement. With their respective service priorities and in their role as advocates, these officers viewed matters of doctrine more rigidly than did their counterparts in the field. For them, unalloyed service doctrine prescribed the right conduct of air-ground relations; deviations could hardly be tolerated.

In the turbulent postwar period, Army Air Forces (AAF) leaders moved swiftly and purposefully to create an independent Air Force. In the late 1940s many U.S. Army officers, with some justification, worried that the new U.S. Air Force's absolute control of tactical airplanes and equipment, its doctrinal assertions, and its overwhelming focus on strategic priorities in the emergent Cold War meant that the army would receive less rather than more tactical air support for ground combat operations. In the charged atmosphere of that day, critics often found fault with the air-ground relationship forged during the Second World War and returned to doctrinal citation and interpretation when supporting one position or another in air-ground disagreements or other controversy. Had the various partisans reflected instead on the cooperative, wartime air-ground record of those "comrades in arms" in the XIX TAC—Third Army in Europe, they would have found their worst fears refuted, as indeed they would find similar fears refuted today. When genuflecting before the altars of doctrine in peacetime, it seems the absolute importance of pairing military leaders of goodwill in wartime who respect, trust, and rely on their service counterparts as comrades in arms is easily forgotten.

In preparing this study, I received help from many quarters. Above all I wish to thank Dennis Showalter and Daniel Mortensen for their unflagging support and enthusiasm for the project. Dennis read the entire manuscript and, as always, offered insightful comments and unstinting encouragement. Dan generously shared his wealth of knowledge on tactical aviation in general and Operation Torch, in particular. It was he who first called my attention to the cooperative, rather than confrontational, nature of air-ground relations. I remain in his debt.

Individuals at two major military archives also deserve special thanks. My friend Elliott V. Converse III, a former commander of the Air Force Historical Research Agency at Maxwell Air Force Base, went far beyond the call of duty to support my research efforts. As a result, I benefited from the knowledge and helpfulness of the agency's outstanding group of archivists and historians: Richard E. Morse, Robert M. Johnson, James H. Kitchens, Timothy D. Johnson, Archangelo DiFante, Marvin Fisher, Sarah Rawlins, and SSgt. Edward Gaines. They made special arrangements to accommodate my every request for information on the XIX TAC and related tactical aviation

Preface

subjects. Joseph Caver in the Research Division had copied from Weyland's XIX TAC scrapbook many of the pictures that appear in this volume. I am grateful to John Slonaker, archivist at the USA Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, who introduced me to a wealth of information on the Army and Army Air Forces, beginning with Third Army's magnificent *After Action Report* of its 1944–45 campaign. Mr. Slonaker also went out of his way to help with long-distance requests.

I also wish to express my appreciation to the people in Norlin Library's Inter-Library Loan Department at the University of Colorado. They enjoyed nothing better than to pursue my requests for obscure military reference material. Their success record was outstanding and I am grateful. Several others assisted on specific areas of the work. Jerold E. Brown of the Army's Combat Studies Institute at Fort Leavenworth supplied me with important material on the Lorraine Campaign and shared his understanding of the Army's special long-term interest in it. David MacIsaac willingly tracked down Gen. James Ferguson's television interview and provided useful information on the Battle of the Bulge. My friend Bang Nguyen assisted enormously with the maps and charts.

Special thanks are owed several former participants in World War II tactical air campaigns in Europe, and I will always be grateful for the privilege of sharing their recollections and insights. They are Lt. Gen. John J. Burns, 371st Fighter Group P-47 pilot; Maj. Gen. Robert L. Delashaw, Commander, 405th Fighter Group; Brig. Gen. Russell A. Berg, Commander, 10th Photo Reconnaissance Group; Gen. James Ferguson, XIX TAC Combat Operations Officer; and Gen. Robert M. Lee, Ninth AF Deputy Commander for Operations.

I am especially indebted to Cargill Hall, the person responsible for contract histories at the Air Force History and Museums Program, who carefully edited the final manuscript and helped make the story more readable, understandable, and convincing. Others who read and contributed most helpful suggestions are: Perry D. Jamieson, Eduard Mark, David R. Mets, Daniel R. Mortensen, John Schlicht, Richard K. Smith, David Tretler, and Herman S. Wolk. Any errors of fact or interpretation that remain, of course, are my own.

At the end of this project I am more than ever convinced that the tale of Generals Weyland and Patton, of the XIX TAC teamed with the U.S. Third Army in the Second World War, deserves to be told. These men's achievements continue to inspire and instruct, and I am pleased to spread the word.

David N. Spires
Boulder, Colorado

Contents

Foreword	v
Preface	vii
Charts	xiii
Maps	xiii
Photographs	xv
1 The Doctrinal Setting	1
Evolution of Early Tactical Air Doctrine	1
Doctrine in Practice: Operation Torch	7
Tactical Air Doctrine Refined	14
2 Preparing for Joint Operations	21
The Generals Paired	23
Organizing Allied Assault Forces for Joint Operations	28
Manning and Equipping the Assault Forces	33
Training Underway	39
The Issue of Joint Training	43
Normandy: On the Job Training	49
Air-Ground Support System Refined	56
Hedge-Row Fighting to a Breakout	64
3 The Battle for France	69
Exploiting the St. Lô Breakout: Blitz Warfare U.S. Style	70
Supporting Patton's End Run to the Seine	86
From the Seine to the Meuse	96
Protecting Patton's Southern Flank	103
A Decision in Brittany	108
Final Pursuit to the Mosel River	113
The French Campaign Reviewed	118
4 Stalemate in Lorraine	123
Autumn's Changed Conditions	123
Refinements in Command and Control	128
Stalemate along the Mosel	132
Planning an Offensive	143
From Metz to the Siegfried Line	149
Mission Priorities and Aerial Resources	158

Air Power for Patton's Army

Assault on the Siegfried Line	171
Lorraine in Retrospect	181
5 The Ardennes	185
Operation Autumn Fog	186
The Allied Response	190
Victory Weather	199
Support Facilities and the Aerial Relief of Bastogne	203
Protecting the Corridor, Dealing with Friendly Fire	208
The <i>Luftwaffe</i> Responds	215
Consolidating Support Elements and Flight Operations	220
Clearing the Bulge	225
Ardennes in Retrospect	234
6 The Final Offensive	239
Operational Challenges and New Tactics	242
Into the Siegfried Line	248
Through the Eifel to the Rhine	254
Springing the Saar-Mosel-Rhine Trap—and	
Across the Rhine River	260
Once More: “Blitz Warfare U.S. Style”	270
Defeat of the <i>Luftwaffe</i>	275
Advance to the Mulde River	281
Down the Danube Valley to Austria	283
Victory	289
7 An After Action Assessment	291
Notes	317
Sources	353
Index	371

Charts

1. Channels of Tactical Control of Combat Aviation in Typical Air Support Command	5
2. Allied Command Relationships in the Mediterranean March 1943	13
3. Organizational Chart of the Ninth Air Force December 8, 1943	31
4. Air Support Mission Request System July 1944	57

Maps

1. Torch Landings in Northwest Africa November 8, 1942	8
2. Ninth Air Force Installations June 1, 1944	42
3. The Normandy Battlefield	50
4. U.S. Airfields in Western Europe, 1944–1945	72
5. Northwestern France, 1944: The Breakout	78
6. Northwestern France, 1944: The Exploitation	92
7. Northwestern Europe, 1944: Pursuit to West Wall Operations, August 26–September 14, 1944	101
8. European Theater	124
9. Northwestern Europe, 1944: 6th and 12th Army Group Operations, September 15–November 7, 1944	126
10. German Counterattacks Against XII Corps: September 19–30, 1944	134
11. XX Corps Operations: October 1944	136
12. XII Corps Attack: November 8, 1944	154
13. Location and Movements of Major XIX TAC Units: November 1944	161
14. Third Army Operations: November 19–December 19, 1944	168
15. Third Army: Last Phase of Lorraine Offensive: December 3–19, 1944	176
16. The Ardennes: The Initial German Attack and Operations, December 16–25, 1944	187

Air Power for Patton's Army

17. Air Assignments for the Ardennes Counterattack December 1944	191
18. The Ardennes Operations: December 26, 1944–January 16, 1945	210
19. The German Offensive in Alsace-Lorraine January 1–30, 1945	221
20. The Ardennes Operations: January 17–February 7, 1945	231
21. Eastern France and the Low Countries, December 16, 1944– February 7, 1945, and Allied Plan for Rhineland Campaign ...	241
22. West-Central Germany and Belgium, 1945: Rhineland Campaign Operations February 8–March 5, 1945	251
23. West-Central Germany and Belgium, 1945: Rhineland Campaign Operations March 6–10, 1945	259
24. West-Central Germany and Belgium, 1945: Rhineland Campaign Operations, March 11–21, 1945	261
25. Germany: Crossing the Rhine, Operations, March 22–28, 1945	269
26. Germany, 1944: Encirclement of the Ruhr, Operations, March 29–April 4, 1945	274
27. Germany, 1944: Reduction of Ruhr Pocket & Advance to Elbe & Mulde Rivers, Operations, April 5–18, 1945	277
28. Central Europe, 1944: End of the War, Final Operations, April 19–May 7, 1945	284

Photographs

Gens. George S. Patton and Otto P. Weyland	xviii
Gen. Bernard L. Montgomery	9
Field Marshal Erwin Rommel	10
Brig. Gen. Laurence S. Kuter	11
Gens. Lewis H. Brereton, Carl A. Spaatz, and Dwight D. Eisenhower . . .	15
Gens. George C. Marshall and Henry H. “Hap” Arnold	16
British Air Vice Marshal Sir Arthur Coningham with Brig. Gen. Aubrey C. Strickland, and Lt. Gen. Frank M. Andrews . . .	17
Lt. Gen. Mark Clark with Patton in Sicily.	21
Lt. Gen. Omar N. Bradley	22
Lt. Gen. Patton and Brig. Gen. Weyland	23
General Patton with troops of the 3d Infantry Division	25
Maxwell Field, Alabama	26
President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill at Casablanca.	28
Maj. Gen. Lewis H. Brereton	32
Air Marshal Trafford Leigh-Mallory	33
Maj. Gen. Elwood R. “Pete” Quesada	36
P-47 Thunderbolt	37
Lt. Gen. Henry H. “Hap” Arnold	44
Aerial photo of the formidable defenses at Normandy Beachhead	52
The D-Day assault.	53
Armorers attach a 500-lb. bomb to a Thunderbolt.	55
An F-5 with D-Day invasion markings.	61
Air attack, 406th Fighter Group	63

Air Power for Patton's Army

Maj. Gen. Troy Middleton	70
Crews arming P-47s	74
An air-ground officer directs aircraft (above); a Ninth Air Force tactical air liaison officer with the Third Army (below).	75
Night armed reconnaissance missions using tracers	76
Maj. Gen. John S. Wood	77
Army engineers laying steel mesh (top), and broom-massaging the airstrips (bottom).	82
Aviation engineers preparing fields for landing aircraft (top), engineer battalion works on a bomb crater (bottom).	83
Mechanics hoist a severely damaged P-47 onto a trailer (top), technicians are checking planes (center), and a mechanic checks out a P-51 Mustang (bottom).	84
A crane is used to transfer bombs (top), airmen load crated bombs onto trucks (bottom).	85
The command post for Gen. Weyland's rear headquarters near Laval . . .	93
Col. Russell A. Berg	95
German Enigma machine	105
Field Marshal Bernard L. Montgomery with Lt. Gens. Omar Bradley and William H. Simpson.	106
Some of the 20,000 German prisoners who were surrendered to General Macon, Ninth Army, and General Weyland, XIX TAC, on September 16, 1944	107
Maj. Gen. Richard E. Nugent	114
Transportation Section, rear headquarters, Chalons, France.	116
Gen. O. P. Weyland in a Thunderbolt	120
Gen. O. P. Weyland awards an Air Medal to Col. Roger Browne	128
A P-61 night fighter equipped with rockets.	130
Brig. Gen. Gordon P. Saville	138

Contents

The lab of the 10th Photo Reconnaissance Group	142
Breaching the Etang de Lindre Dam at Dieuze, France, before (above) and after (below)	145
Generals Patton (right), Hodges (left) and Bradley (center).	147
Gasoline for Patton's Third Army arrives	150
An F-5 from the 31st Photo Reconnaissance Squadron.	152
Maj. Gen. Ralph Royce	155
Demolished command post of the 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division at Peltre, France	156
A cutaway of a German FW 190	157
A-20 Havoc in France.	162
Air and ground coordinators near the front (top and bottom)	164
Coordinators receive messages (top), direct overhead aircraft (middle), and help spot for flak and ground fire (bottom)	165
Generals Spaatz, Patton, Doolittle, Vandenberg, and Weyland (left to right), December 1944	175
Low-level photo taken at the Siegfried Line (top), Patton's troops breach the formidable defenses (bottom).	178
Generals Patton and Patch	179
A squadron commander with his flight leaders	180
Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt with Adolf Hitler.	186
Gen. Hasso von Manteuffel	188
Vehicles move past wrecked American equipment (above). Tanks from the 4th Armored Division in the Luxembourg area (below). .	193
A P-38 from the 367th Fighter Group.	197
Paratroopers from the 101st Airborne Division	198
Capt. Richard Parker, 405th Fighter Group (left), a P-61 forced to crash-land (below).	202

Air Power for Patton's Army

C-47 crash-landed after dropping its supplies.	205
F-6s (above), an M-7 tank directs fire (below).	207
Col. James Ferguson and General Weyland	213
Gens. Weyland and Sanders, with Col. Browne and Gen. Patton	214
Damage caused by the <i>Luftwaffe</i> raid on January 1, 1945.	216
Radar installation	218
Photo of the Saar River at very low altitude.	224
Bf 109	227
Troops from the 4th Armored Division (top), 101st Airborne Infantry Division troops move through Bastogne (bottom)	228
Destroyed 88-mm gun (top). An ambulance (bottom) removes wounded	229
General Weyland and his staff meet with General Vandenberg and General Schlatter	230
Destroyed self-propelled gun near Dasburg, Germany	236
The Bullay Bridge collapsed into the Mosel River.	243
A 354th Fighter Group P-51 Mustang	247
Ninth Air Force fighters entrenched in snow.	250
Shot of Saarburg, Germany	255
Troops from the 90th Infantry Division	263
A tank destroyer from the 4th Armored Division	264
Thunderbolts hit an ammunition train (top), a truck convoy (center), and a locomotive (bottom).	266
Generals Patton (with pointer) Eisenhower, and Devers	267
Third Army crossing the Rhine River	271
P-51 from the Pioneer Mustang Group	279
Generals Patton, Spaatz, Doolittle, Vandenberg; and Weyland	280

Contents

P-47s with occupation stripes during the postwar period.	292
German Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt	314



Gens. George S. Patton and Otto P. Weyland